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Boston Architectural College ISSN 1552-4655 • \$15/yr.

23  
yearsPublishing The Boston  
Informer

# THE BOSTON INFORMER

No. 113

The newsletter for people who care about Boston

Winter 2015

## New Day for Boston Redevelopment Authority

**BRA Reforms Lauded** Mayor Marty Walsh is “building the new Boston Redevelopment Authority” and beginning to respond to the KPMG performance review released in July 2014. In a 2014 year-in-review document, BRA Director Brian Golden lauds changes and reforms the Authority has implemented in response to the 2014 KPMG audit.

**Improving Policies and Protocols:** Key reforms include shifting control of spending Inclusionary Development Policy funds from developers to the Dept. of Neighborhood Development; changing criteria for establishing Planned Development Areas; requiring developers to reveal conflicts of interest; requiring more public review and scrutiny of land takings and transfers; drafting guidance on allowing corporate signage at the top of big buildings; and protocols for granting and extending development designations on BRA land.

**Modernizing Systems and Organizational Structure:** Better employee orientation, training, and recognition; elevating planning and rezoning efforts, including fixing inefficiencies in the zoning code and making improvements to permitting and Zoning Board of Appeal (ZBA) processes. Some 23 categories and 250 use codes were consolidated into 9 categories and 60 uses. Staff is identifying the top ten single-item variance requests that account for one-third of ZBA applications; upgrading technology for workflow efficiency and bet-

ter public access and “transparency” (includes posting BRA Board briefing materials online); revamping the Research Dept.; and the big one, begin developing a comprehensive citywide master plan for the first time since 1964.

**Maximizing BRA/EDIC Assets & Enhancing Fiscal Accountability:** Focus on compliance and asset management by hiring new controller, compliance program manager and lease administrator; collecting \$4.3 million in unpaid receivables from BRA tenants; identifying underutilized BRA parcels to sell or transfer such as Charlestown’s Shipyard Park to Parks and Recreation and nine parcels in Boston Marine Industrial Park; and convening a BRA committee to track linkage money.

**Nurturing Opportunity & Financial Empowerment among Residents:** The BRA says one of its duties is “fostering opportunity and empowering the financial wellbeing of residents.” This falls to the Office of Jobs and Community Services (JCS), a BRA affiliate that promotes economic self-sufficiency for residents. JCS is now focused on “wealth-building” including more free tax help; the City created an Office of Financial Empowerment outside the BRA; a renamed Roxbury and South Boston Center for Financial Empowerment for residents and a new Center For Economic Opportunity run by Jewish Vocational Service.

## Back Bay Air Rights Development

MassDOT selected a Florida developer, The Peebles Corporation, to develop its Back Bay Mass. Turnpike air rights Parcel 13 at the corner of Boylston Street and Massachusetts Avenue. The \$328.3 million project includes a \$40 million deck over the Turnpike and redesign of the MBTA’s Green Line Hynes Convention Center station.



The Viola selected by MassDOT for its Parcel 13 air rights at Mass. Ave. and Boylston Street.

Peebles beat out two Boston developers with a proposal for a 373,000 s.f. development dubbed The Viola. The Neighborhood Association of the Back Bay put its support behind Peebles

citing the developer’s adherence to the 120-foot height limit per 1986 zoning. NABB’s letter said the other firms would have built to double the height allowed. It noted that a firm that bid on the parcel before had also proposed building within the 120-foot limit. That developer, Trinity, did not propose 120 feet this time.

The project will include 85 rental units and 88 condominiums, a 156-room hotel, 26,000 s.f. of retail, and 138 parking spaces. The de-

sign in Peebles proposal is a long, undulating building with a maximum height of 11 stories (120 feet) at the north end of the space over the Turnpike and stepping to 7 stories at Massachusetts Avenue.

The project will include a new fully accessible Hynes station with entrances on Massachusetts Avenue and Boylston Street. Peebles will also upgrade aging Green Line electrical equipment. Boston’s HDR Engineering, designers of the new Government Center MBTA station, will design the station. The air rights architect is Handel Architects of New York. Local team members include Utile (urban design); McNamara/Salvia, air rights structural engineer; John Moriarty & Assoc., construction manager.

MassDOT and MBTA reviewed three development proposals with a Citizens Advisory Committee, Boston Redevelopment Authority. The project must undergo a full state and City permitting process, as well as review and approval by MassDOT and MBTA. Peebles told The Courant it hopes to break ground in 24–36 months. Occupancy could be in August 2023.



View of entrance to new Hynes MBTA station on Boylston Street

## Mayor Walsh's Office and Cabinet: Who's in the Inner Circle?

Mayor Walsh has been in office 16 months. In key areas covered by The Boston Informer (development, transportation and housing) and related areas, many of Mayor Walsh's top people are newcomers, people without municipal experience. And one position in his cabinet and a few key positions have still not been filled. Walsh himself is new to City Hall and executive branch leadership, and his choice of top staff who are also newcomers is interesting.

Fourteen key positions (one vacant) were looked at:

- Arts and Culture
- Boston Redevelopment Authority
- Chief of Staff
- Civic Engagement
- Corporation Counsel
- Economic Development
- Environment, Energy, & Open Space
- Health and Human Services
- Housing & Neighborhood Development
- Innovation & Technology
- Policy
- Public Works
- Streets, Transportation & Sanitation (vacant)
- Transportation

Only 38 percent (five) had worked for Mayor Menino and only about 60 percent (eight) have experience working in city government. Boston has 22 neighborhoods, but for some reason, 38 percent of the commissioners and chiefs live in Dorchester and South Boston. Nine are white, two Hispanic and two black. Sheila Dillon in Housing & Neighborhood Development, BTD Commissioner Gina Fiandaca, Michael Dennehy, Public Works (interim), Jerome Smith, Civic Engagement, and Brian Golden, BRA, were previously with the City. The Streets, Transportation and Sanitation slot has not yet been filled and might have been an important one in the past few months with snow and trash as well as streets being an issue of major importance in the City.

There is no question the younger crew Mayor has in his inner circle have new ideas on how to run the City. However, there is an issue of the importance of having some experience with "boots on the ground" in operating a city when working on instituting innovative operations.

Statistics are important in a fact-hungry culture. But while filling 18,000 potholes is data, if the potholes were not in critical locations the numbers are less meaningful. Snow removal reports for the number of trucks and miles of streets plowed were issued, yet critical short stretches, including that at 116 Huntington Ave., were missed, leaving Huntington Avenue as a single lane at a key intersection. Data are good, but "semi-attached numbers," numbers that look really interesting but actually are not as relevant as they appear, are not. The data-driven circle now leading City programs should heed the warning: "Don't confuse effort with results."

## Proposed Copley Place Expansion (Tower) Update

—A meeting held by the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA) that was billed as "Public Meeting to discuss the application to Amend and Restate the PDA on the Copley Place Expansion project" turned into an examination of affordability commitments and other key program details. This was the first public meeting on the project in over 18 months. The project is a 52-story mixed-use tower with 542 units, 120 condominiums and 422 apartments. An earlier proposal was to have 318 condominiums, but the program had been changed prior to the PDA submittal to account for a market change to smaller units and a stronger rental market. The tower will be built where the equestrian statues "Paint and Henry" stand.

The amendment was called a "technical" amendment to "clean-up" some overhead and below-grade easement issues (canopies and below-grade utility easements within the PDA site).

However, 20–25 members of the public were quite vocal about the affordable housing aspects of the plan. Simon Project Manager said 71 affordable units will be spread throughout the rental apartment portion of the tower. Attendees questioned why the affordable component was changed from 25 percent of total units to 15 percent of the apartments only. Response: the percentage was part of the agreement made with the State and the City.

There was also a question as to why the affordable housing portion would remain affordable for 50 years while the Land Lease Agreement with the State was for 99 years. The mitigation benefits discussed included \$1 million for Public Art at the Southwest Corridor, sidewalk improvements for the Southwest Corridor as well as Back Bay Station sidewalk improvements and a \$250,000 grant to Copley Square.

The proposed traffic pattern has not been changed. The plan is to narrow Huntington/Stuart Street. When asked about issues with the Westin Hotel's Stuart Street truck loading area, officials said the issue is "one of enforcement by the City" and will probably continue to be the same bottleneck.



View of proposed 52-story Copley Place tower from Copley Square at Dartmouth Street.

Source: Simon Property Group/Elkus Manfredi Architects

## Why So. Boston's Transportation Problems Won't Be Solved by the Silver Line—

The South Boston Sustainable Transportation Plan (January 2015) coordinated by A Better City put up some monster numbers about the level of development planned for the So. Boston Waterfront (and a little part of the South Station area)—more than 51 million s.f. after 2040. Even more alarming is the total number of automobile trips, transit and walk/bike trips that will be generated in peak periods and will be hard to accommodate without significant investment.

Issues with both the data used in the plan and the recommendations surfaced after the plan's release. On the recommendations, the plan fails to discuss how many trips could be accommodated by the suggested minor transit improvements (bus, Silver Line and a bus rapid transit line). No cost estimates or order of magnitude estimates were provided making it impossible to evaluate tradeoffs.

On the data, the plan included parts of residential South Boston in its count of existing residents. While the plan said there are 10,867 So. Boston Waterfront residents, both the Fort Pointer blog and the "2007-2011 American Community Survey," BRA Research Division Analysis, report the So. Boston Waterfront population at about 2,100. By overstating the existing residential population, the plan concludes that only small transit upgrades are needed because the future number of residents will be only 2.5 times greater than now (using the higher 10,867 number) not 12.7 times greater. The Fort Pointer notes there are or will be by 2018 only about 3,770 units within 1/4 mile of a Silver Line station or stop, considerably fewer than the plan claims.

The plan identifies the changing mix of land uses in the study area from office to one-third residential as the key to reducing impacts on the roadway network and transit (residential land uses are "good" because swapping a residential unit for the same square footage of office reduces the transportation demand of a development by about 50 percent). Unfortunately, millions of square feet of office space were built before this plan identified housing as the savior. The result are optimistic numbers of non-auto trips: about 47,000 peak-hour transit trips and 64,000 pedestrian/bike trips. If the non-auto percentage estimates are wrong, thousands more auto trips will be added to the 62,500 new trips the plan estimates. And there's no back-up plan.

## Boston 2024 Olympics: The Basics

Despite the mainstream media spilling as much ink covering Boston 2024 as it did on Watergate, there is a dearth of readily available basic "facts" as presented by Boston 2024 in its bid documents.

The Boston Informer waded through the hundreds of pages of the bid documents to unearth the following "facts":

- Boston 2024 is a private organization led by John Fish of Suffolk Construction and Richard Davey who is chief executive officer.
- 2024 Olympics would run from July 19 through August 4; Paralympics would follow from August 14 through August 25.
- Total cost estimated at \$4.7 billion with revenues estimated at \$4.7 billion.
- Planning principle: "Compact Games in a Compact City."
- Olympic Village at UMass Boston would provide 16,500 beds (at least 10,000 new).
- Media require 17,500 beds.
- All workers and spectators will be required to take public transportation to venues. No spectator parking will be provided.
- Venues: 18 existing; 14 temporary; and 2 new (Assembly Square velodromes).
- "Olympic Lanes"—dedicated highway lanes—will be designated on key highways and arterials.
- Boston bid due to International Olympic Committee Jan. 2017.
- International Olympic Committee selects 2024 host in Sept. 2017.

## What's Up?

**Northern Avenue Bridge (again)** After decades of fruitless discussion and planning about what to do with the bridge (repair or demolish and rebuild) the bridge was found to be unsafe, even for pedestrians, and left in the "open" position to allow water traffic, which puts great stress on the bridge and could hasten its collapse. Full rebuild would cost in the \$50 million-\$70 million range which the city cannot afford. So, with no state or federal aid likely, Mayor Walsh has ordered his staff to come up with cheaper solutions that the City can afford by April...2015.

**Downtown Waterfront Municipal Harbor Plan** In April 2013 the BRA appointed a 34-person (about half attend the meetings) Downtown Waterfront Municipal Harbor Plan Advisory Committee to help develop a plan for the area east of the Greenway from the Moakley Bridge to Long Wharf. The Committee has been meeting regularly (see TBI issues 109, 111 and 112) with a recent two-month pause (for holidays, snow and for the BRA to start drafting a plan).

The twice-monthly meetings resumed on February 25 and the BRA issued a draft of the first five of eight chapters of the plan covering background, history and regulatory frameworks. There are inconsistencies in the draft, such as a stated goal to "implement the Greenway Study Wharf District Guidelines" (Chapter 1) which limited densities on the waterfront side of the Greenway compared to densities on the city side, in contrast with Chapter 4.4 which states that "high-density developments are appropriate for this part of the Boston Harbor Waterfront, provided commensurate offsets are identified for the required Substitute Provisions."

Also, there is emphasis on offsets and substitutions rather than conforming as much as is practical to the Chapter 91 waterfront regulations.

**Governor Baker's First 3 Months** were surely an eye-opener. Besides the snow, Baker inherited a huge deficit from Deval Patrick as well as a number of Patrick "legacy" last-minute projects, appointments and initiatives. Baker rescinded a slew of last-minute appointments in early January. Could these projects be re-examined now, too?

- Parcel 13 Back Bay air rights designation
- Elimination of Route 203 Casey Overpass in Forest Hills
- Public-Private Partnership Commission members
- MassDOT Board members
- State Transportation Building sale and relocation to Roxbury

## BRA Planning Department Management

**Consultant Services** contract with McKinsey & Company out of Washington, DC, is a four-month effort about to wrap up. A five-phase analysis was undertaken in part in response to the pro-bono KPMG audit done in 2014. Phase 2b of the McKinsey scope of work is a gem: "...we will work with BRA leadership to define a revised vision for city planning within Boston. This phase will be highly collaborative, with direct input from BRA leadership, as well as from other key stakeholders." Any "key stakeholder" contacted by McKinsey to assist with the revised vision please contact The Boston Informer!

Final report due sometime in April 2015.

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A publication of ATC Information, Inc.

## Welcome to The Boston Informer

The goal is simple: Provide concise public information on construction projects, planning initiatives, and whatever else affects living and working in Boston. Welcome to The Boston Informer!

The Boston Informer is published electronically by ATC Information, Inc., five times yearly in Boston, Mass. President: Anthony Casendino; vice-presidents, Anne McKinnon, Chris Fincham.

The Boston Informer is available by subscription only. Via e-mail, \$15 per year; via USPS, \$29 per year (cheap!). Questions? Telephone (617) 723-7030, fax (617) 437-1886 or e-mail: [BostonInformer@cs.com](mailto:BostonInformer@cs.com). Check us out on the Web at [www.bostoninformer.com](http://www.bostoninformer.com)!

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## Mayor Walsh announces snowstorm space saver program rules



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## Innovation District Talking Space Saver featuring Hizzoner

## You Were Asking

- Q.** The Boston Informer is a high-quality, "data-driven" publication. Can you tell me how many people actually elected Marty Walsh mayor?
- A.** From The Boston Informer research department: Boston had a population of 537,433 over 18 years old and 372,664 registered voters in November 2013. Marty Walsh got 20,000 votes in the primary to John Connolly's 18,000. In the general election, 72,514 cast ballots for Walsh (67,606 went for Connolly). Bottom line: About 19.4% of registered voters elected the current mayor.
- Q.** I recall you reported [in 2011] the "public-private" Hubway bike share operation uses parking spaces on Boston streets, then about 300 parking spaces, free. How come the City is fixing to sell licenses for a car-sharing company to park on the street?
- A.** Right. The issue is dealing with lost revenue from removal of meters. Car share will pay up to \$3,500 per space and Hubway pays nothing. The City said it owns the Hubway equipment and "does not get compensated by 'itself'." Car share company owns its cars. It seems the City ignores the cost of on-street Hubway spaces and sticks it to the private car-share company despite the social value of car sharing.
- Q.** Boston 2024 has a payroll of about \$2 million per year plus about \$120,000 per month for consultants. Who is picking up this enormous tab?
- A.** Beats us. Please let us know when it's revealed.

## PEOPLE MOVERS

- Rory Cuddy**, from Mayor Walsh's chief of staff's office, to Startup manager, reporting to Chief of Economic Development John Barros and the BRA.
- Roseanne Foley** was appointed executive director of the Boston Landmarks Commission. Previously executive director of Fields Corner Main Street organization and a consultant for Uphams Corner Main Street.
- Gina Fiandaca**, from deputy commissioner at Boston Transportation Dept., to commissioner.
- Austin Blackmon**, from Terraverde Renewable Partners in California, to Boston chief of Environment, Energy and Open Space.
- Joe Rull**, from Mayor Walsh's chief of operations and administration, to Boston 2024 chief administrative officer.
- Nicole Freedman**, from director of Boston Bikes, to head Seattle's Active Transportation initiative.
- Stephanie Pollack**, former Conservation Law Foundation attorney and associate director of the Dukakis Center for Urban and Regional Policy, to MassDOT transportation secretary.
- Richard Davey**, former MassDOT secretary, is the new CEO of Boston 2024.
- Tommy Chang**, local instructional superintendent in Los Angeles, is new Boston Public Schools superintendent.
- Jeanne DuBois**, from executive director of Dorchester Bay EDC to senior advisor for Community Engagement Strategies for Dorchester Bay EDC.